

# Getting to Alaska



Courtesy photo

*There are three ways to get to the Great Land: fly, drive the Alaska Highway, or ride an Alaska Marine Highway System ferry.*

*Flying is probably the easiest way to get here. All one needs to do is get a travel authorization from your departure post and a ticket to fly commercially to the Anchorage or Fairbanks International airports will be provided.*

For the more adventuresome, the Alaska Highway offers one of the most exciting routes north. Originally known as the ALCAN (Alaska-Canada) Highway, the Alaska Highway weaves northwest for 1,440 miles from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to Delta Junction, Alaska.

Fort Richardson-bound personnel will turn onto the Glenn Highway at Tok, Alaska, for the last 328 miles to Anchorage. Fort Wainwright-bound personnel will continue northwest on the Richardson Highway for another 80 miles or so to Fairbanks. It's a long haul, but the scenery is magnificent and, in summer, the fishing opportunities along the way are almost limitless. Plan to spend four or five days on this stretch alone. Your PCS orders must specifically authorize travel via the Alaska Highway if you wish to

The dust situation is only bad after long dry spells. To keep the dust out, keep some air pressure in the car by closing the windows and turning on a fan. Filtered heating or air conditioning tends to bring in less dust than open windows and vents. Be sure to service your carburetor air cleaner frequently.

Finally, with all these things in mind, take it easy and take your time. Stop now and then to relax and take in the rugged North Country. About 350 miles a day on the varying surfaces of northern roads is plenty.

Your best source about crossing the border into Canada is available in a book called "So, You're going to Canada," which you can get from the Canadian government travel bureau. The book contains information on vehicles and what is allowed concerning baggage, firearms, fishing

## Driving to Alaska

drive. If you're driving in the winter, inquire as you go to ensure the facility you plan to use that night is open.

Publications are available along the Alaska Highway and in bookstores in the Pacific Northwest. Perhaps the best source is The Milepost, the only all-north travel guide, which lists all attractions and facilities along all northern highways in Canada and Alaska, mile by mile.

Should your car break down, passing motorists will normally stop to offer assistance.

Virtually all of the Alaska Highway is now paved, with the pavement varying considerably in quality. However, since road construction in the North is limited to the summer season, you can expect occasional long stretches of road under repair or construction. Depending on the weather, the routing around or through these construction sites can be very muddy or exceedingly dusty.

gear, animals, recreational equipment, food and medicines.

Reentry into the United States upon reaching Alaska is easy and is the responsibility of the traveler. Canadian immigration officers will usually caution persons if they may have problems returning to the United States. Reentry can be simplified if you list all purchases made in Canada before you reach the border. Keep sales slips and invoices separate, and pack the purchases for convenient inspection.

U.S. citizens do not need a passport to enter Canada. Some form of positive identification is required, however. Often a driver's license is sufficient, but Canadian authorities can and do ask for more identification at times. A birth certificate if you were born in the United States or naturalization papers if you were born in another country will usually suffice. It's a good idea to include copies of these documents in your travel kit.



*The Alaska Highway starts at Dawson Creek, British Columbia.*



Photo: Ron Dalby

## Taking Extra Care

Some extra care should be taken when making the long drive north. When you reach the Canadian border, you should have at least \$500 in cash, traveler's checks or credit cards, plus \$75 for each adult passenger. If you plan to use gas credit cards, make sure your company or an affiliate has service stations along the route that will accept your card. Chevron, Texaco and Shell are the most frequent stations found in Canada, which are familiar to U.S. residents.

Yet, because the north is so

sparsely populated, don't count on finding one of these brand-name stations at every potential gas stop. The "major" cites along the route: Fort Nelson, British Columbia; Watson Lake, Yukon Territory; Whitehorse, Yukon Territory; and Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory are spaced at roughly 300-mile intervals, and each of these should have one or more of the brands of gasoline described above. In between these communities, various small businesses exist to provide gas, food and lodging and the gas credit cards you carry may or may not be acceptable at these places.

VISA cards are almost universally accepted.

Insurance coverage required in Canada is higher than normally required in the United

States. You should check in advance with your automobile insurance provider to make certain your coverage is adequate for Canada and complies with all of that country's requirements. You should have a copy of the policy or some other proof of this insurance in hand when you enter Canada. Normally your insurance company will fax you a sheet of paper noting that your insurance is adequate and in force for a trip through Canada if you ask them to do so.



*Grizzly bears are not an endangered species in Alaska and Canada.*

## BE PREPARED WHEN DRIVING TO ALASKA

Although auto repair is generally available along the Alaska Highway, it can be expensive and there can be delays if you have to wait for parts specific to your vehicle. It's always a good idea to carry a few common items made for your vehicle, such as:

- ♦ Sparkplugs
- ♦ Fan belts
- ♦ Trailer bearings
- ♦ Tune-up items (points, condenser, etc.)
- ♦ A properly inflated spare tire mounted on a wheel.

Even if you don't know how to install these items, any competent mechanic you contact along the road should be able to help. Besides these items, a repair kit containing some of the following general-purpose items is a good idea as well:

- ♦ Jumper cables
- ♦ All-purpose tape (such as Duct tape)
- ♦ Sheet-metal screws and rubber washers to repair holes in crankcase or gas tank
- ♦ General hand tools.



## *Cautions for the Alaska Highway*

Virtually the entire highway between Dawson Creek and Alaska is asphalt, but the surface ranges from poor to excellent. During the summer, gravel road patches and rocks can damage gas tanks, radiators, windshields and headlights. You can protect your car by including a rock deflector screen, gas tank protector and undercoating. Make sure your tires are in good condition and carry a spare tire at least the equal of the tires on the road. The small, temporary donut spares commonly provided with small, lightweight vehicles are utterly worthless on the Alaska Highway.

Wash your car as soon as possible after the trip, because the calcium

chloride used to control dust on gravel patches can erode paint and metal. During the winter months, from October through April, packed snow can eliminate some of the rock and gravel problems, but cars need cold-weather protection and gear. This may include an engine heater, antifreeze, thinner oil, studded snow tires and warm clothing. Tire chains are occasionally required for some stretches during the winter months, so be sure you carry a set with you and know how to install them. Temperatures may fall to minus 50 degrees in the winter.

Remember, not all businesses are open all year, nor are they available

24 hours-per-day, so plan ahead for gas, food and lodging.

Although most highways in Alaska are paved, the freezing and thawing of permafrost (permanently frozen ground) in the northern three-fourths of the state and in Yukon Territory can cause the road to buckle. If you drive too fast on these stretches, you can lose control or you can cause severe damage to your vehicle. Slow down and proceed with care when this is the case.



*Dall Sheep*

*Muncho Lake, between Fort Nelson and Watson Lake on the Alaskan Highway.*

Photo: SSgt Michael Nichols



## Winter Driving Tips

For people who've never driven on ice and snow, the important thing to remember is Alaska is not a racetrack. Snow and ice on the road greatly reduce the traction of your tires so it takes longer to start, longer to stop and longer to get where you're going. Make sure you allow extra time for everything when driving in the winter.

To avoid winter collisions, maintain a minimum distance of 50 yards between your vehicle and someone else's. More is better. When slowing down or stopping, don't slam on the brakes or you will probably skid and lose control. Pump the brakes gently, and shift to a lower gear if possible. In case of a skid, turn the steering wheel in the direction of the skid. More modern cars with ABS brakes may specifically state in the owner's manual that you avoid pumping the brakes and allow the system to do its job in bringing your vehicle to a smooth stop. Do not rely exclusively on this recommendation, as sometimes conditions are so slick that ABS brakes may lock your wheels.

When you brush the snow off your windshield, take the time to clear the rear and side windows, too. In winter, vision in every direction is important and may help prevent an accident.

Speeds that may be safe in summer are not safe on ice and snow. The distance required to bring a vehicle to a safe stop on a slippery surface may be three to nine times longer than on dry pavement. Always adjust your speed to road and weather conditions.

Cars should not have to be plugged in unless temperatures drop below zero. Interior car heaters are prohibited because they are a fire hazard and an extra drain on the electrical system.



Photo: Charles Newman

## WINTERIZING YOUR CAR

Probably the only thing you need to do to your car before bringing it to Alaska is to make sure it is in good shape. This includes a tune-up, maybe changing belts and hoses that are more than two years old, and making certain your coolant is adequate to minus 50 degrees or colder. Other than that, the mechanics in the Lower 48 may not have enough experience to understand cold-climate requirements.

Here's what the old timers suggest:

♦ An engine heater is a must to fight off winter temperatures. There are two types of heaters, a circulating heater or a freeze plug. Either one will do the job. There are also extension cords with a nightlight available so you can tell from indoors if the car is receiving electricity and keeping the engine heated.



♦ Another important thing is to change to an arctic-weight lubricant for the differential and transmission. Also, wheel bearings need to be packed in lighter grease.

♦ Other necessities include a northern (hotter) thermostat and a battery blanket, plate or trickle charger to keep the battery warm and charged.

♦ The oil should be changed to 5W-30 or to special arctic oil. Check your owner's manual carefully before deciding on which oil to use. In the extreme cold, lubricants can thicken, so thinner oil is almost always the right way to go.

♦ After winter is over, it is important to change the car back to its regular, thicker lubricants. The circulating/freeze plug heater and other mechanical modifications will probably be fine if left in place, but it's not a bad idea to check them out to see if they work come September.





## CANADIAN FIREARMS RESTRICTIONS

Soldiers transporting privately-owned firearms through Canada or via the Alaska Marine Ferry System must meet the requirements of the Canadian Firearms Act. Canadian gun laws are quite strict and violators may have firearms confiscated or find themselves facing five-year terms of imprisonment and a \$5,000 (Canadian) fine.

The law recognizes three classes of firearms. Prohibited firearms, restricted firearms, and non-restricted firearms. Prohibited firearms are full automatics, converted automatics, handguns with a barrel length of 105 mm (approximately four inches) or less, and others. No prohibited firearms or replicas of prohibited firearms may be taken into Canada.

Restricted firearms are mainly handguns. To bring a restricted firearm into Canada you must be 18-years of age or older and acquire an Authorization to Transport from a provincial or territorial Chief Firearms Officer before you arrive at the point of entry into Canada. You cannot get the Authorization at your point of entry.

Non-restricted firearms include most ordinary rifles and shotguns. To bring non-restricted firearms into Canada,

you must be 18-years of age or older, declare your guns at your first point of entry, complete a Non-resident Firearms Declaration form in triplicate, have it confirmed by a customs officer, and pay a fee of \$50 Canadian (approximately \$33 US).

All TMO/ITO Officers are to ensure that, when booking HHG Shipments containing firearms, with appropriate commercial carriers, that commercial carriers know that line hauling firearms through Canada may require specific permits. If proper permits are not obtained, firearms could be confiscated, and carriers could be fined or subjected to other strict laws of Canada.

Complete information on Canadian gun laws for residents and visitors, as well as fee lists and all required forms can be found on the Canadian Firearms Centre Website at [www.cfc-ccaf.gc.ca/Default-en.html](http://www.cfc-ccaf.gc.ca/Default-en.html). Questions on taking firearms through Canada can also be answered by calling (403) 862-723 or (867) 667-3943. Travelers are advised to determine which class their firearm falls into, and apply for necessary forms in advance of anticipated travel dates.

One of the most beautiful ways to travel to Alaska is via the Alaska Marine Highway System, operated by the state. The system consists of two separate ferry routes: Southeast and Southcentral. The ferries carry vehicles and passengers and they travel at a leisurely pace, with observation decks, staterooms and food service.

The southeastern Alaska route connects Bellingham, Wash., and Prince Rupert, BC,



Photo: Ron Dalby

*The Alaska Marine Highway System ferry, M/V Aurora.*

summer. To make reservations, write Alaska Marine Highway, Pouch R, Juneau, AK 99811 or phone Juneau at (907) 465-3941 or Anchorage at (907) 272-7116. A ferry schedule and reservations can also be made via a toll-free number: (800) 642-0066.

Passenger travel, including a stateroom on the ferry, is at government expense. Your Transportation Office can issue you a Government

## Taking the Ferry

with the Alaska towns of Ketchikan, Wrangell, Petersburg, Sitka, Juneau, Haines, and Skagway. The latter two connect with the Alaska Highway leading to Delta Junction, Fairbanks and Anchorage. The trip from Bellingham to Haines takes three days. There are a couple of sailings per week in the summer and only one per week during the winter. From Haines, it's another 700 miles to Anchorage and 650 miles to Fairbanks by road. (See the section on driving the Alaska Highway for

additional information.)

Since 2000, another ferry route has been opened that allows passengers and vehicles to ride as far as Seward, Alaska, which is about 130 miles south of Fort Richardson or about 475 miles south of Fort Wainwright. Sailings are relatively infrequent—about once a month in the winter and twice a month in the summer.

Reservations should be made at least one month in advance in winter months and as early as possible (prior to December is recommended) for the

Travel Request for passage or you can be reimbursed when you arrive at your new duty station in Alaska.

If you have already shipped a POV through the government and decide to take the ferry and place another vehicle on the ferry, you may be reimbursed for cost of the vehicle on the ferry. If you did not ship a privately owned vehicle to Alaska, you can receive reimbursement for cost of vehicle placed on the ferry; the vehicle cannot exceed 800 cubic feet.

# Transportation

*All personnel assigned to forts Wainwright, Richardson and Greely are authorized to ship personal property or household goods (HHGs), one privately owned vehicle (POV), and for travel to Alaska at government expense. When shipping a POV at government expense, a member may still be authorized to drive to new duty station, since driving falls under one's travel entitlement and shipping of a POV falls under a shipping entitlement. The following information will help each member prepare for a move to the Great Land.*

Upon receipt of orders to Alaska, soldiers should contact their local Transportation Office. Transportation will provide you with a Department of Defense Form 1701-Inventory of Household Goods to help estimate the weight of the property you plan to ship.

Start planning your move well in advance. It normally takes between 30 to 40 days for personal property to reach Alaska, depending on how much you ship and from where you ship it.

The maximum HHG weight allowance that a member can ship is

non-temporary storage for the duration of your overseas tour. Ask your Transportation Office to discuss the Overseas Consignment Guide Instructions for your new overseas duty station.

In lieu of household goods, your mobile home may be shipped, but extreme caution is needed. This can be extremely frustrating and expensive. The amount that you can expect to be reimbursed is based upon maximum HHG weight you are authorized to ship IAW JFTR, Vol. 1, Chapter 5. Excess costs can be extremely high, in

## Personal Property

determined by grade and whether or not you are serving an accompanied or unaccompanied tour. If your shipment exceeds your weight entitlement, it could cost you hundreds, even thousands of dollars, so estimate the weight of your goods carefully before shipping.

Each individual coming to Alaska is also authorized a baggage shipment, but keep in mind that the weight of baggage shipment counts against your maximum weight allowance. Some members elect to simply combine their personal property into one single shipment. This works well if you are planning on taking leave en route to Alaska. If you are making a single shipment, you may want to request a partial delivery. The partial delivery will enable you to receive certain items when you arrive and have the government temporarily store the remaining personal property until you receive quarters. Items designated for a partial delivery must be designated at time of pick-up and "partial delivery" should be authorized on your government bill of lading. This should be requested at the time of counseling. You can also have property that you choose not to bring to Alaska placed in

addition to the extensive modifications that may be required before it can enter the state. If you plan on moving your mobile home, you should contact the Transportation Office. You can also write the Alaska Department of Commerce, Weights and Measures Section, 2263 Spenard Road, Anchorage, AK 99503 for information on necessary modifications.

There are no on-post mobile home lots. A limited number of facilities are available in nearby communities.

Your local personnel section can help you concerning a sponsor and concurrent travel. You must apply for a sponsor and concurrent travel for family members before leaving your present duty station. In most cases, if housing is available, concurrent travel is authorized. Have your sponsor check on this. Members should be advised that if they plan on arriving at their new overseas duty station as a single member, then return home and get married, the government will not pay for movement of newly acquired dependents and personal property. Dependent status must be acquired prior to member arriving at his/her overseas duty station. For more information, contact your local



# Shipping Your Car

Transportation Office.

Here are some suggestions you may want to consider in shipping your household goods to Alaska:

- ◆ Normally, non-temporary storage is authorized at the departing duty station, not at the gaining duty station
- ◆ Large, oversized and over-stuffed furniture will not fit into many of the quarters.
- ◆ Long couches and workbenches, usually longer than 7 feet, 6 inches, will not go around the entrance corners, so should not be shipped.
- ◆ Queen-size box springs, unless in two parts, may not fit up the stairways. Two-piece king-size beds are not a problem, but very large dressers may be.
- ◆ Freezers of more than 17 cubic feet will not fit through the doors.
- ◆ Television antennas are not generally needed.

◆ Government Quarters are equipped with appliances, including washer, dryer, stove and refrigerator. Some have dishwashers. Drapes are not furnished.

◆ Liquid items, such as canned foods and drinks, will not be accepted for shipment between October and April because of the danger from freezing if your goods must be left in an unheated area for any reason.

Remember, you will probably spend three years (two years at Fort Greely) in Alaska. Items such as small appliances, curtains, fishing gear, golf clubs, skis, home furnishings, pictures, paintings and extra bookshelves will make your stay more enjoyable. Don't forget your lawn mower. Long hours of daylight in the summer means the grass grows quickly. On-post residents may use Self-Help lawnmowers.

**M**ilitary members assigned to Alaska are authorized to ship one vehicle, maximum of 800 cubic feet, at government expense. This may be in addition to driving another vehicle to Alaska via the highway. Receiving a proper counseling for shipping a POV from the departing Transportation Office is a must before members take any action to ship their POV.

Many people choose to drive to Seattle, ship their vehicle from there, and fly to Alaska. If you are closer to the East Coast, you may want to ship your vehicle from an authorized port serving your departing post. Transit times vary from each port but shouldn't exceed 40 days.

Personnel assigned to forts Wainwright and Greely can pick up their vehicles in Fairbanks. Those assigned to Fort Richardson can pick up their vehicles in nearby

Anchorage. Personnel can receive specific information for Vehicle Processing Centers at Fairbanks or Anchorage, such as, address, maps, phone number and hours of operation from the departing Transportation Office.

When you pick your vehicle up, the shipper will conduct another joint inspection of your vehicle to note the car's condition when it arrived. Any damages that occurred between turn-in and pick-up should be noted on the Privately Owned Vehicle Shipping Document, Department of Defense Form 788. Remember, it is your responsibility to ensure that the receiving port properly annotates all potential damages on the DD Form 788 prior to accepting vehicle and departing the port facilities. Questions concerning potential damages should be referred to the legal claims office at origin or destination PDS.

## PREPARING YOUR VEHICLE FOR SHIPMENT

Preparing your vehicle for shipment is essential before turning it into the port for shipment. Before you deliver it to the port, you should ensure:

- ◆ It is in a safe operating condition or it will not be accepted.
- ◆ A complete set of keys is turned in to the port along with the vehicle.
- ◆ The radiator is protected with antifreeze for temperatures of minus 50 degrees.
- ◆ The battery is fully charged.
- ◆ No more than 1/4 tank of gas.
- ◆ Only essential tools and accessories are left inside.
- ◆ A few items such as thermos bottles and seat cushions are permitted for driving to the port.
- ◆ The port shipping activity will conduct a joint inspection of your vehicle when you deliver it and do an inventory of all accessories. The port shipping activity will annotate the vehicle-shipping document as to condition of your vehicle when it is turned in. Be sure you get a legible copy of that inspection prior to leaving the port activity. When you arrive on post at your new duty station, check with the Fairbanks or Anchorage Vehicle Processing Center Transportation Office to see if your vehicle has arrived, or provide a phone number where you can be notified when it does arrive. Remember, if the receiving Vehicle Processing Center Transportation Office cannot reach you, you may experience a delay in receiving your vehicle. In Alaska, that can be a very unpleasant wait, especially in the winter.

